

**CAESAR'S COMMENTARIES
ON THE GALLIC WAR.
TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH
BY T. RICE HOLMES**

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HON. LITT.D. (DUBLIN)

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PREFACE

THE rough draft of the following translation was made many years ago both as a labour of love and as an aid to the composition of the narrative of my *Caesar's Conquest of Gaul*; but the publication was deferred, partly because I had other work to do, partly in order that I might be able to elucidate not only the chapters which treat of the Gallic War, but also those which are devoted to the invasions of Britain.

A translator cannot but fail unless he is in sympathy with his author; and, however gifted he may be, I doubt whether he can do justice to more than one writer, for his own style will remain the same. Jowett's *Thucydides* is a great intellectual achievement and a noble example of English prose; but, compared with his *Plato*, it is a failure. Moreover, even though each age may demand its own version of a classic, there is a time for translation as for everything else. The Authorized Version of the Bible was made at the right time: supposing that the work had been

deferred until, say, the latter part of the nineteenth century, would not the gain in scholarship have been bought too dear? What would have become of David's lamentation on the death of Absalom? What should we have had instead of "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace"? A much later stage in the development of our language would have fitted Caesar, but I fear that it has gone: would not Swift, our great master of unadorned prose, or even Southey, less powerful, but unsurpassed in clearness and taste, have caught his spirit?

The sympathetic translator, while avoiding the error of imitating style, will strive, after he has completely seized the author's meaning, to forget that he is a translator, and simply to express in his own tongue every detail, every *nuance* of thought which the author expressed in his. Of course he will be making an attempt which, at the best, can only approximate to success; he will be forced again and again to compromise; but, given the needful ability, his work will go far to suggest, without the least sacrifice of accuracy, the effect of the original. I hope that even this attempt, with all its defects, will here and there reflect, however faintly, the dignity, the terseness, the directness, the lucidity, the restraint, the masculine energy of Caesar's style. To reflect its occasional roughness and carelessness is less difficult. The effect of the *Commentaries* was not

due to toil in revision, for which Caesar had no time, but to his personality ; and it is in the last three books, after he has done with Britain, that the subject gives full scope to his narrative power.

A translation of a modern work may read like an original composition ; but not one of Greek or of Latin.¹ Every sentence may be idiomatic English, but the whole must needs have a certain flavour of antiquity, because not only matter but also standpoint and treatment were of an old world. If we forget that our Bible is a translation, the reason is obvious. It is a mistake to try to modernize the antique by translating words denoting concepts that are no longer real by familiar modern terms that are not equivalent. Where the translators of the Bible neglected accuracy in order to avoid what was strange the error was unimportant.

The text from which this version is made is not absolutely identical with that of any extant edition, but generally agrees with that of H. Meusel. Wherever I have followed a reading different from his I have noted the variation if it was of any importance.

No modern reader can fully understand

¹ Jowett, in his masterly essay on translation (*The Dialogues of Plato*, 3rd ed., vol. I., 1892, p. xv), says that it should ; but his own translation of *Thucydides*, notwithstanding the beautiful English, does not read like an original work. Why should it ? Ought it not rather to read like an ancient work interpreted by a modern ? As Jowett himself said in his *Thucydides* (p. xvi), "the whole manner of ancient writing was different from our own."

Caesar's writings without a commentary. I therefore suggest that readers of this translation should consult *Caesar's Conquest of Gaul*¹ and *Ancient Britain and the Invasions of Julius Caesar*, which are fully equipped with maps and plans. I would also recommend M. Camille Jullian's *Vercingétorix* and the first two volumes of his great work, *L'Histoire de la Gaule*.² The earlier part of the third, which, I believe, will appear before long, will contain an account of the conquest. M. Jullian is not only a scholar of the first rank and a sane and acute critic, but also a real historian and an admirable writer. I have given references to his work as well as to my own, and wherever it was possible to write explanatory notes without entering into the discussions which were necessary in my other books, but would have been out of place in this, I have done so. I have also taken account of the relevant books and articles which have appeared since the publication of the smaller edition of *Caesar's Conquest of Gaul*.

The map is virtually identical with that which illustrated *Caesar's Conquest of Gaul*, and which represented the results of my researches; and the references in the explanatory note are to the original edition of that volume. I should like to take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude

¹ Both the larger and the smaller edition are described at the end of this volume.

² Paris, Hachette et Cie, 1908.